

CASA Director Continues Helping Area Abused Youth

by: Eric Stoff, Peru Tribune
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After six years as director of Miami County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Kurt Kiefer said Thursday the biggest requirement for the job is compassion. "You just have to care," he said.

Kiefer, an Indianapolis native, has lived in Miami County for 11 years and worked in a juvenile prison before working for CASA. "We always dealt with the kids after they'd gone through the ordeals of being abused or neglected and weren't able to be saved," he said.

However, with Kiefer's role in CASA, he's able to help the children before they get to that point. "We're there in the beginning to stop abuse and neglect from occurring," he said.

He said many misunderstand CASA, which isn't a foster home and isn't the Department of Child Services but is assigned to children in the Circuit Court system for child abuse or neglect cases.

CASA represents children and checks in on their situations throughout the process and strives to improve their situations. "We basically give the parents the tools they need to help raise their children better," Kiefer said. "We're there for the child's best interest."

Kiefer said the job sees its share of intense highs and lows.

"The rewarding parts of this job are seeing families reunited and seeing them not come into the court system again...Just watching kid's smile," he said. "Realizing that this is a small child that's really done nothing wrong in his life, but he's been beaten for no other reason than to be picked on - that's one of the hardest parts of this job."

Kiefer said "the sexual abuse side" "is one of the hardest things" he deals with "because the innocence of that child is taken for the rest of their life."

"I don't know how much counseling will ever change for that child," he said.

CASA has about 30 active volunteers but is currently seeking more. Kiefer said there isn't a designated number of volunteers needed, but the goal is to not have any children on their waiting list, which currently has about 38. According to Miami County CASA's webpage, an average number of children on a waiting list is 19.

Kiefer said volunteers need to be 21 years old, will have several background checks done on them, have to take classes, require 30 hours of training and must be approved by a judge.

According to a release from CASA, volunteers can expect to spend four hours per month helping children. "Volunteers receive ongoing education and support from their local program as well as from the state and national CASA association," the release said. CASA can be reached at 472.3901 ext. 309.